

Committee/Meeting: Cabinet	Date: 3 August 11	Classification: Unrestricted	Report No: (CAB 021/112)
Report of: Corporate Director: Steve Halsey Originating officer(s) Heather Bonfield: Interim Service Head, Culture, Learning and Leisure Services, CLC		Title: The Baishakhi Mela in Banglatown, Brick Lane: transfer to community management Wards Affected: Bethnal Green South / Bethnal Green North / Weavers	

Lead Member	Cllr Rania Khan
Community Plan Theme	A Great Place to Live
Strategic Priority	Strengthen and connect communities

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Baishakhi Mela is a major Bengali New Year celebration that attracts people from Tower Hamlets, across Britain and from other countries. It has grown in size since it was founded in 1998 and it is estimated that in 2011 120,000 people visited the Mela and its environs in Brick Lane.
- 1.2 From 2002-2007 it was organised by the Baishakhi Mela Trust (BMT), but in 2008 the Council agreed to run the Mela in-house pending its return to community management. The Council organised the Mela in 2009, 2010 and 2011, but it is now considered the opportune time to appoint a successor organisation to continue to organise it. The suggested process for this is set out below.

2. **DECISIONS REQUIRED**

Cabinet is recommended to agree:

- 2.1 That the Baishakhi Mela in Banglatown, Brick Lane be returned to community management for 2012 and that the right to manage the Mela be granted for a period of nine years, subject to reviews at year one, three, and six by an independent panel.
- 2.2 The approach to select a successor organisation as set out in the report, including the proposal to delegate the recommendation of the successor organisation to an independent panel which will be supported by staff.
- 2.3 The outline specification as set out in the report as set out in paragraph 6.3 of the report

- 2.4 The level of financial and other support for the successor organisation as set out in paragraph 6.4 of the report
- 2.5 The timetable for granting the right to manage the Mela as set out in paragraph 6.6 of the report

3. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 3.1 The Council's management of the Mela was intended to be temporary and it is now considered the opportune time to return it to community management.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The option to continue to run the Mela in-house is not recommended as there is a strong wish within the community to return the management to a local organisation.
- 4.2 The option to cease to support the Mela is not recommended; there is huge local support for the event and without the Council managing the transfer arrangement it is likely to result in confusion and multiple competing rivalries.

5. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Baishakhi Mela first took place in 1998 and was originally funded by Cityside Regeneration. When this funding ended in 2002 the Baishakhi Mela Trust (BMT) was formed to take the event forward. This organisation had difficulty in finding funding for the event and during the period of its management, received practical support from the Council and grants ranging from £4,000 - £25,000.
- 5.2 During this period there was growing disagreement within the community as to who should run the Mela, with two groups contesting the right – the BMT and the New Banglatown Baishakhi Mela Trust. In 2008 the issue came to a head when both organisations sought to run the event on Weavers Field on the same day. The 2008 Mela was again organised by BMT without financial support from the Council.
- 5.3 In November 2008 the Cabinet considered options to sustain this important cultural and community event. The options put forward were to contain the Council's role to licensing only, to continue to support BMT as the lead agency for the Mela or to manage the event in-house for a limited period and set up a new Trust. One-off funding was provided to sustain the Mela whilst its ability to generate income and sponsorship were developed to enable it to be self-sustaining in the future.

- 5.4 The Council managed the Mela in 2009, 2010 and 2011 during which time it increased sponsorship and identified and developed areas for income generation which could be continued by the successor organisation. In 2011 there was a high level of community engagement with regard to the arrangements and there appeared a keen appetite for the event to be returned to community management. As the Council intended to only undertake a transitional role, it is proposed that steps are taken to return this to community management for 2012
- 5.5 The Cabinet decision in 2008 indicated that the Council should form a Trust to take over the Mela. This has not proved practicable and it is now proposed to seek instead an organisation that is self-selected and formed from local people committed to managing a successful event.

6. BODY OF REPORT

- 6.1 During the development and implementation of the 2011 Mela there was increased engagement with the community, primarily through the voluntary Baishakhi Mela Advisory Board, but also through a more localised Mela Parade which involved a number of local organisations. There was a strong desire shown to return the Mela to community management and this report sets out a process for achieving this that relies on the community forming its own management arrangements rather than the Council trying to undertake this process.
- 6.2 It is proposed to undertake the following processes to allocate the right to hold the Mela in Weavers Field/Allen Gardens/Brick Lane:
- Cabinet approve the approach to return the Mela to the Community
 - A specification will be produced (see headlines below)
 - The opportunity to manage the Mela will be advertised widely
 - Responses will be shortlisted (if necessary)
 - Representatives of shortlisted organisations will make a presentation to/be interviewed by an independent panel who will recommend an applicant to Cabinet
 - The Mela Selection Panel will be formed of suitable independent representatives. The Panel will, with the support of officers, examine detailed documentation and negotiate final arrangements with the preferred applicant
 - A report will be submitted to Cabinet on 5 October recommending that the responsibility for the management of the Mela transfer to that organisation
 - Cabinet approves the final arrangements
 - Paperwork finalised and the right will be awarded for a period of nine years, with reviews at the end of one, three and six years. The review will be undertaken by the Independent Panel.
- 6.3 The Specification Headlines:

- The Mela to be held in Weavers Field/Allen Gardens/Brick Lane
- To take place in May
- A free to access event
- The applying organisation will either be a Trust or must form a Trust within one year of being appointed; the successful organisation will be not-for-profit.
- Board members will be selected by the Trust, but the Council would, to protect its own reputation, expect them to comply with the highest standards (i.e. people without criminal records).
- The organisation will apply for and secure annually a Premises License for the event, but it is not expected that the event will commence before 12.00 or end after 20.00
- There will be a requirement for a parade to form part of the event
- The successful organisation will need to demonstrate effective arrangements for consulting the local community on the contents of the programme and to offer a range of entertainments reflecting the tradition of Bengali arts. However the organisation will have artistic license with regard to the final programme
- A family zone should form part of the offer
- The organisation will be transparent in its financial arrangements
- The organisation will need to comply with all health and safety requirements and will need to satisfy the requirements of all the organisations that form the Safety Advisory Group; it is expected that professional support will be engaged for this activity in view of the anticipated audience numbers.
- The organisation will be expected to adhere to noise control measures
- The organisation will need to demonstrate annually that it has full insurance cover
- The Council would expect sponsors for the event to be acceptable (for example no cigarette / alcohol companies)

Should the terms of the specification not be sustained by the successful organisation, the Council may reduce/withdraw its support.

6.4 Support from the Council: The Council will, for the period of the award (subject to the successful organisation meeting the above requirements) provide the following support:

- A grant award for the parade. This will be allocated through the Council's mainstream grants awards process and be monitored to ensure the outputs demonstrate value for money. Grants are awarded for a period of three years
- The Council will provide road closures, parking suspensions, and training for high risk food traders free of charge
- The Council will enable restaurants (where pre-agreed) to have tables and chairs on Brick Lane on the day of the Mela free of charge
- Weaver Field/Allen Gardens will be provided free of charge
- The Council will assist in the clear-up of the area free of charge

- The Council will publicise the event free of charge in council publications, on council websites and in council premises
- The Council will, in 2012, pass on remaining S106 (Balleymore) funding that it has secured for the Mela and which has to be used for participatory elements of the event
- The Council will not grant permission for any similar events in Weavers Field or any other park / open space.
- The Council will support the new Mela Trust to secure funding and ensure that funding will be available to the Trust to support its transition to full self-sufficiency

6.5 A Service Level Agreement will be required for the grant for the Parade in accordance with other mainstream grant allocations.

6.6 Timetable: It will be necessary to award the right to manage the Mela at least six months in advance of the event. Subject to the agreement of Cabinet at this meeting there will be two months to advertise, select the recommended organisation and finalise agreements ready to recommend award to 5 October Cabinet, which is a very tight (but achievable) timetable.

7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

7.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to agree that the Baishakhi Mela be returned to community management for 2012 onwards and the approach to select a successor organisation.

7.2 The successor organisation will continue to receive support from the Council for the MELA for the period of the award as detailed in Para 6.4 of the report. Financial support could be made through the Council's mainstream grant programme for a period of three years which would be made subject to complying with conditions. For 2012 Section 106 funding has been secured to fund participatory elements of the event, this will be available for the MELA.

8. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)

8.1 As this is the grant of a concession the Council is required to let it through an open and transparent process. Accordingly the selection of the organisation will be assessed against pre agreed selection criteria and bidders will be given the high level criteria and weightings with the invitation to bid.

9. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 The Tower Hamlets Baishakhi Mela is the largest celebration of the Bengali New Year outside of Bangladesh. It is therefore of great importance to the local community as well as an opportunity to spotlight the Borough as it is

broadcast through speciality media across the World and has, for three years, been featured by BBC Asia Network. Its primary focus is to showcase the best of traditional and modern Bengali culture, but it attracts visitors from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds who come to enjoy the music, food, colour and excitement.

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1 Large crowds generate large amounts of litter and waste; wherever possible these are recycled.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There is a risk that the successor organisation will not be able to generate sufficient funding to be able to run a successful event. During its three years of management the Council has been able to raise the level of income, for example by tendering for sole trading right for mobile phones, supply of ice cream, etc. The Council can assist by advising the successor organisation (if required) where to procure goods and services and an indicative budget available for artists, etc. The council is also assisting by absorbing some costs which could be recharged. (In doing this it is following the approach taken for other non-commercial events and festivals.) The Council will support the new Mela Trust to secure funding from other sources and will ensure that funding will be available to the Trust to support its transition to full self-sufficiency
- 11.2 There is a risk that after the Mela has been awarded other organisations may seek to run rival events. The Council will not allow its parks and open spaces to be used for such events and will reserve Weavers Field / Allen for the successful organisation.
- 11.3 Notwithstanding the above support the successor organisation may still fail; reviews will be undertaken at year one, year three and year six and a report will be submitted to Cabinet should it prove necessary to review the arrangements for the Mela.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The detailed arrangements for the Mela will continue to be considered by the multi-agency Safety Advisory Group, which includes the Police. During the past three years there has been a very low level of crime and arrests at the Mela and robust arrangements have been in place to ensure that people entering Weavers Field are unlikely to cause problems, the event has been stewarded effectively and the crowd has been managed on exit. It is not anticipated that the new management arrangements will result in an increase in crime and disorder.

13. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

- 13.1 Considerable officer time is taken with collaborating with the local community and organising the Mela. With the forthcoming emphasis on community engagement during the year of Olympic Games, the Royal Diamond Jubilee, and the need to stimulate income-generating events in parks and open spaces the transfer of responsibility for this event to the community who will welcome the opportunity to lead on this important event. Officer advice and support will however be available if required. .

**Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)
List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report**

Brief description of "background papers"	Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection.
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None